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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this investigation was to gain an understanding of the role that television plays in the daily lives of a number of elderly male individuals who are partially confined and socially restricted in a long care facility. An inductive, qualitative study was conducted over a three-month period in western Canada in order to obtain an in-depth description of the television experience of these residents. Pertinent questions about viewing patterns, program preferences, level of involvement, and significance of television in their daily lives were asked of receptive male television viewers who were able to lend insight and depth to the presentation and expression of ideas, thoughts, and experiences of their use of television. The participants were grouped as orientation, entertainment, educational, and escapist viewers, and the motivations, genre preferences, and characteristic behaviors of these groups were compared. The study established that: (1) confined elderly watch a great deal of television; (2) social isolation exists; and (3) television may be a contributing factor to this isolation. It is suggested that educational and awareness building may help to educate viewers about the role of television in their lives. (94 references) (CGD)

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THE ROLE OF TELEVISION IN THE DAILY LIVES OF THE ELDERLY

by

Nan MacLeod- Engel

Paper Presented to the 1986 International Television Studies Conferen

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The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this investigation was to gain an understanding of the role that television does, or does not, play in the daily lives of a number of elderly individuals who are partially confined and socaily restricted in a long term care facility.

An important aspect of this study was the inclusion of viewers and nonviewers in order to gain a realistic picture of the role of this medium in their lives. Television may act as an inhibitor to (Aronoff, 1974; Blau, 1973; Canadian-Radio television Commission, 1973) or a vehicle for (Davis, 1971; Glick, 1962; Roberts, 1979) increased contact with others in the elderly's somewhat already limited environment.

Television as a Social Change Agent

It extends our understanding of ourselves, our environment, and alters our institutions, values and very life styles. Despite the advances in the communications field, the gap between public information institutions (the broadcast industry) and groups in our society appears to be steadily widening. Because of the mass information being broadcast to the mass culture, special groups appear to be communicating less with the larger community.

Television as an Instrument of Social Power

It has proven itself a purveyor of some of the most important symbols and images of our age, but has become turned to mass tastes and needs, due to the market place(Zolf, 1973, p. 9). This leaves scant room for minority and special interest group programming. When communication channels are in short supply the need for community expression goes unheeded.

What is needed is a medium of communication that can meet the specialized needs and interests of different parts of our community. The demise of the popular mass society magazines, i.e., Life and Saturday Evening Post, in favour of special interest magazines points the way. The introduction of home video movies, video cassette

recording units, and special channels on cable and pay television points to the beginning of this phenomenon in the electronic media. Yet, many of these choices presented to the general public remain unavailable to some segments of the community.

There is a need for information channels that reflect the interests and concerns of a variety of "community of interests" (Zolf, 1973, p. 11) that comprise a modern society. One such group are those who find themselves partially confined and socially restricted such as the residents of long term care facilities. This principle holds true for those who find themselves confined and restricted to their own homes. These individuals, very much a part of our community, have special needs, interests, and preferences for types of information and programming which appear over these channels of communication. The demystifying of the media, in a society where the established economic and political powers know and take pains to control the power of the media and their use, is the frist step toward change.

This is not to say that groups of individuals who find themselves confined and restricted may be in a position to act upon the media but they may be in a good position to begin to understand how the media acts upon them. An awareness of the personal use and meaning of television in one's daily life is the first step in the direction of addressing the community of interests within our society.

Current Research

Recent studies do not examine the relationships between increased age and physical condition and the use of television. It is possible that a decrease in the availability of economic and social resources, along with personal physical and psychological limitations that increase with age, limit the options and activities available to the elderly individual in the community. If the elderly, in general, are a somewhat special group as a television audience, then institutionalized

elderly individuals should be considered an even more specialized group within that population.

Previous research has been conducted using quantitative deductive methods. This approach does not permit the researcher to distinguish between active and passive television viewing behaviour. This type of research can only examine the incident rate of the viewing experience and cannot elicit the level of participation of the viewer. In contrast, the observational approach supports inductive, holistic, emic, subjective, and process-oriented research methods which are used to understand, interpret, describe, and develop theory pertaining to a phenomenon or a setting (Field and Morse, 1985, p. 138).

Further, no information about the role of television as a social or anti-social experience for the elderly has been discussed. Does television act to bring the elderly a common experience which they can share in conversation and social interaction or does it have a tendency to isolate the elderly from each other and the exposure to other social networks (Marshall, 1970)?

Little and dated information exists concerning the use of other media by the elderly. The reading habits (popular press) and listening preferences (radio, audio tapes, and records) have not been examined except in a cursory way. There are little data available to determine if the elderly see television as more important than other forms of activity and social interaction. Do the elderly prefer watching television to engaging in crafts, or hobbies, or visiting with friends and acquaintances? And finally, researchers have not examined how the television experience may influence other aspects of the daily lives of the elderly. Can television content influence how the elderly feel about themselves and how they feel others see them?

Statement of the Problem

The elderly are heavy users of television (Atkins, 1976, p. 31) and much of their

time is spent watching it during their daily routines. Research seems to indicate that the elderly who are partially confined and socially restricted tend to be even more dependent upon television (Canadian Radio-Television Commission, 1973); yet, there is no research that addresses the meaning of television for this group. The public needs to have a clearer understanding of the attachment of the elderly to television if they wish to capitalize upon this important channel for communication in reaching the elderly of our communities. Therefore, this research will examine the following question: What are the viewing patterns, programme preferences, the level of involvement with and the significance of television in the daily lives of male residents in an extended care facility?

The results of the study can not be generalized to other elderly populations. However, as this is not the purpose of an inductive qualitative study, but rather to describe and develop theory pertaining to a phenomenon or a setting (Diers, 1979).

Review of the Literature

The ageing and the elderly in the industrialized countries of the world are the center of much speculation, discussion and research. Presently, the elderly comprise approximately 11% of the population (Statistical Abstracts, 1980) in the United States and 10.6% of the Canadian population (Statistics Canada, 1984). However, the constant advances in medical technology, coupled with health care improvements and a declining birth rate, has lead to the speculation that the elderly might well comprise fifteen to twenty percent of the total population by the year 2030 (Butler, 1980). The growing numbers of aged persons make it imparative that every effort be made to identify and meet the needs of the elderly population. Disengagement is often dramatically thrust upon them, isolating them from social contact with the outside world. The mass media -- especially television -- become their lifeline, putting them in

touch with society (Anderson, 1984).

A review of the research literature for the past ten years (Atchley, 1978; Cassata, Anderson, and Skill, 1980; Csikszentmihalyi and Kubey, 1981; Gantz, Gartenberg, and Rainbow, 1980; Gonzalez, 1979; Greenberg, Korzenny, and Atkin, 1979; Hess, 1978; Korzenny and Neuendorf, 1980; Northcott, 1975; Real, Anderson, and Harrington, 1980; and Shina, Tomer, and Biber, 1980) presents us with a concern for the image and portrayal of the elderly in television and does not address the use and meaning of television in the daily lives of the elderly. The past decade did not reflect this interest as a research priority.

Embracers of Television

Glick and Levy (1962) have referred to the elderly as "embracers" of television and a parallel has been drawn by Davis (1975) between the "captive" and "Dependent" status of the aged toward television and the preschooler's similar viewing status. This view has been supported by Isenber (1977), who found that administrators of numerous senior citizen communities and nursing homes experienced difficulty in promoting participation in organized activities as a result of heavy television viewing, and some have been forced to schedule activities around the most popular television programmes. Schalinske (1968) and Bower (1973) have both pointed to the elderly's generally enthusiastic and uncritical attitude toward television content. Schalinske also discovered a tendency in the elderly toward rigidity and routinism of behaviour patterns which found a focus, he suggested in television programming schedules. Davis (1971) concluded that even the most ciritical of the elderly viewers preferred having a television set than being without it. Although these studies examined the place of television viewing in the lives of the elderly, non dealt exclusively with the role television plays in the lives of older homebound adults. The identification of the elderly as active daily television viewers is well documented (Davis, 1971, 1972, 1975 [a & b], 1976,

DeGrazia, 1961; Meyersohn, 1961; Rubinstein and Comstock, 1972; Schramm, 1969; and Tebbel, 1974). Hoar (1960) and Schalinski (1968) both found that television viewing was not only a frequent activity among this group but that this activity tended to increase with age until physiological and psychological impairments caused a slow decrease in the activity.

Explanations for the Reliance of The Elderly on Television

Current research studies offer five explanations for the reliance of the elderly on television, some watching upwards of six hours a day. First, research indicates that they disengage from active social involvements to more passive observations (viewers) of their environment (Berelson and Steiner, 1964). Second, a more sedentary lifestyle and more leisure time among the elderly was noted by Meyersohn (1961). The third was the idea of television providing a common interest for topics of conversation (Marshall, 1970; Steiner, 1963). Fourth, the entertainment element of television was first discussed by Glick and Levy (1962) and it was later reaffirmed by Davis (1975a). Lastly, Christenson and McWilliams (1967) noted that television was a tranquilizing agent for the elderly viewer, and a "Godsend for those charged with the care of the elderly" in institutional settings (p. 17).

Davis and Edwards (1975) identified television as the most readily accessible channel for communication with the older persons in their study and that it was equally valued for entertainment, companionship, and for filling in the time (Anderson, 1984, p. 11). Davis and Edwards also concluded that few researchers had actually recorded the number of hours a week many of the elderly (those over the age of sixty-five) spent viewing television, but estimates ranged from forty to sixty hours per week (1976, p. 71).

Researchers Suggest Some Functions of Television for the Elderly

Davis (1980), discussed in Anderson (1984, p. 11) advises that there are three general functions of television in our society. The first is the social function, which

acts to facilitate the process of socialization of the viewer. The second general function is the personal function. Television serves this function when it acts to facilitate the structuring of values and attitudes that aid the viewer to develop needed strengths. Here Davis includes the role models, social behavior, expectations for the future, and states that they are incorporated into the social structure of the viewer. The third function of television is its information function. Television serves an information function when it acts to facilitate transmission of facts needed for effecting the social and personal function and for providing the viewer with current knowledge pertinent to one's welfare.

Television Viewing: Its Importance and Functional Use

Entertainment

Schalinski (1968) found that the very old (average age eighty years) were not attracted to documentaries and other serious public affairs programmes. This was also found by Glick and Levy (1962) who reported that there was a preference among the elderly for "wholesome and happy" programmes rather than "intense" programmes. Similarly Korzenny and Neuendorf (1979) found the elderly watched television primarily for entertainment.

According to Adams and Groen (1974), Bogart (1956), Bower (1973), Danowski (1975), David (1971), and Tennant (1956), content forms such as variety shows, musical programmes, documentaries, and travelogues were rated highly by the elderly. Detective shows, love stories, commericals, and programmes showing civil disobedience were disliked.

Relief of Boredom

Meyersohn (1961) enumerates three conditions which might particularly predispose the aging person to television.

First of all, he grows more sedentary; second, he has more

> leisure time; and third, he has fewer ties with the (outside) world (p. 264).

Steiner (1963) provides a striking example in a quote from one of his subjects which well illustrates the importance of television in the life of one elderly person:

> I'm an old man, and the TV brings people and music into my life. Maybe without TV I would be ready to die; but this TV gives me life. It gives me what to look forward to - that tomorrow if I live, I'll watch this and that program (p. 35).

Television, Meyersohn states, can serve not only as a time killer but even as time itself. Steiner's quote well illustrates the older person's dependency on television; the importance of the medium to him or her; and the scheduling, with anticipation of what is going to be viewed on television, of the next days activities.

Substitution for Social Interaction

The aged homebound person finds him/herself in a social situation that is severely reduced in social interaction. Because of their disabilities and immobility, homebound individuals may be forced to disengage from society. In most cases, it could be said that the homebound individual does not wish to be disengaged or separated from personal interaction, and will make every attempt to remain in contact with society. It could, therefore, be expected that homebound elderly persons may use the media as a substitute for the lack of personal interaction afforded them.

People seem to rely heavily on the media to supply them with material for personal conversation, and the extent to which mass media provide this material can be well documented (Chaffee and McLeod, 1973; Greenberg, 1975; and Meyersohn, 1961). People who are homebound, however, have severely reduced opportunities to engage in

personal conversation. Although they may use the media to supply them with information for conversational purposes when they have visitors or use the telepheone, it would seem reasonable to assume that their use of the media is serving a somewhat different purpose. The issue of media as substitution seems well established in the literature.

The use of the media as a substitute for interpersonal interaction was first introduced by Wiege (1969), a psychologist. Wiege suggests that people can make use of the media as a substitute for conversation. He explains that in using the mass media in this way, the person can escape from the demands of interpersonal interaction. In Wiege's opinion, people who use the media as a substitute for interpersonal interaction may feel that they are in close tough with the world, although they are rarely with others.

Horton and Wohl (1979), on the other hand, have a slightly different view of the substitutive ability of the media. They refer to the relationship between the user of the media and the substitution concept as a "para-social" relationship. Horton and Wohl explain that the para-social relationship is between the viewer and the "persona" of the television presentation. the "person" is the typical and indigenous (i. e. inherent) figure of the social scene presented by television. This relationship is as close as the relationship between an individual and his chosen friend. They explain this relationship as follows.

> The persona offers ... a continuing relationship. His appearence is a regular and dependable event, to be counted on, planned for, and integrated into the routines of daily life. His devotees live with him and share the small episodes of his public life ... their continued association with him acquires a history, and the

> accumulation of shared past experiences gives additional meaning to the present performance .... In time, the devotee - the "fan" - comes to believe the he "knows" the persona more intimately and profoundly than others do; that he "understands" his character and appreciates his values and motives (p. 34).

Several researchers suggest that the para-social interaction is one of the reasons for the aged person's heavy use of the mass media. Schramm (1968), for example proposed that much media exposure is undertaken to combat loneliness and alienation characteristic for some older persons. Particularly, he states the loss of access to channels of local news, dissemination on the streets or at work (a from external personal contacts) may be compensated by attention to news content in the media.

Further, Davis (1971) found that the majority of the elderly in this study group recognized that television provided companionship to a moderate or strong degree.

It appears that the elderly's heavy use of the mass media, associated with the need for social and interpersonal interaction and the need for information about the environment, are the subject of much interest among researchers (Cassata, 1967; Danowski, 1975; Graney and Graney, 1974; and Petersen, 1973). For her study on the mass communication and social disengagment behavior of a sample of aging people, Cassata (1977) carried out 177 personal interviews which she stated

> ...yielded a wealth of "impressions" on the role played by the mass media in the lives of in dividuals with reduced levels of interper- sonal interaction. These "impressions" suggested there may be some support for the "substitution hypotheses"; i.e., older persons disengaging in an interpersonal sense, substitute for prior interpersonal

interaction the consumption of mass media (p. 3).

Substitution for decreased social interaction appears to be a significant concept in the literature of media and the aged. Indeed, McQuail and Gurevitch (1974) believe that "hypotheses concerning use of media for substitute conpanionship might focus on those with limited opportunities for social contact" (p. 290). This statement supports the idea in the literature that functions are linked in a sequential manner (p. 239).

Information

Chaffee and Wilson (1975); Comstock, et al. (1978); Davis (1976); Schalinski (1968); and Schramm (1969) all report older people show a marked preference for news and public affairs programming. Young (1979) suggests, that based on the programming preferences of this group, there appears to be a need to secure information about their environment. In addition, the older adults appear to have a desire to "keep up on things," and to "know what is happening in society." Steiner (1963) contends that the popular notion of older people as a consciously disengaging group is not supported.

Rubin and Rubin (1982) state:

> Information is the most salient mass communication need of these older groups, whose primary reason for watching television is to know about people or events in the world or community (p. 309).

Many researchers argue that the older viewer prefers television programmes containing information and serious content rather than entertainment (Bower, 1973; Bush, 1966; Danowski, 1975; Davis, 1971; Lazarfeld and Kendall, 1948; Meyersohn, 1961; Parker and Paisley, 1966; Schalinske, 1968; Schramm and White, 1949; and Steiner, 1963).

Doolittle (1979) also found the news to be the highest type programming chosen

by those elderly who had the least amount of social interaction. Comstock, et al. (1978) found that disadvantaged groups (i.e. blacks, poor, aged) were more likely to look at television for knowledge and information.

Based on the above, it may be stated that the aged homebound, who may be even more alienated from social interaction and interpersonal communcation channels, would have an even greater need for the informational content of news type programmes on televsion. It could be speculated that the elderly homebound may conceivably spend the bulk of their viewing time securing information and knowledge about the environment (i.e. the 'outside' world).

Education

One of the prevailing themes in the literature is the educative function of the media for the older person. This function is interrelated with other functions of the media. Consequently the viewing of television, for example , may have an educational value while being substitutive, relieving boredom, being entertaining, and giving factual information.

Petersen (1973) proposed that; television personalities, particularly soap opera characters, may compensate for lost personal relationships because television allows the older person to reduce isolation and to feel a part of a populated world. Feeling a part of a populated world is related to the educative function in as much as the viewer participates in learning new ideas. In all television presentation, there is a element of incidental learning that takes place for the viewer. Social problems, for example, are presented in dramatic presentations, and the viewer becomes aware or more aware of the issues involved in current social situations. Game shows, asking questions of contestants, frequently draw responses from the viewers, who eventfully hear the right answer and learn, to a degree from the information given. Crime drama presentations advise the viewer how to identify and protect him/herself from crime (paraphrased

from Anderson, 1984.).

Graney and Graney (1974) suggest that the mass media may serve a critical role in maintaining socio-psychological satisfaction when older people lose contact with friends and relatives, and when churches and voluntary organizations become dominated by new and unfamiliar interests. In effect, television may assume the educative role of those institutions.

Danowski (1975) argues that the primary relationship between mass media use and interpersonal communication is substitutive. This is probably correct however, he overlooks the value of the media as an educational as well as social substitute, suggest Anderson (1984, p. 34). He states that media and personal communication are inversely related over the life-span, with greater use of the media at the young and old extremes. It would seem appropriate to also argue that both the young and the old use television for educational purposes. Children's programmes are frequently designed to combine entertainment and education. The same element exists in the daytime and primetime programming as demonstrated previously.

None of this appears to mean that older people are watching television randomly or without plan. Young (1979) for example, states that they are not watching television because they have nothing else to do; and Graney and Graney (1974) confirm the aged are careful planners of their media time. They apparently plan their media activities in such a way as to compensate for the loss of the education tha twould be afforded them through their assocation with social institutions.

In Summary

A number of studies have investigated the aged person's use of the mass media. These studies have explored the amount of time aged people spend with the media, as well as their preferences in media programming. Numerous hypotheses have been suggested regarding the aged person's need for the media to remain in contact with

society; and researchers have, through the investigation of media use and gratification, attempted to identify the needs that are met in this way. It is reasonable to suggest that television may play an important role in the lives of these individuals.

METHODOLOGY

Research concerning television and the partially confined and socially resrtricted environment of some of the elderly in our communities is almost non-existent. Although quantitative research has contributed to our knowledge of the elderly's use of television, qualitative research has not addressed this problem. This reasearch project used a qualitative inductive approach to obtain a deep and rich description of the teleivision experience of the partially confined and socially restricted elderly members of our society.

Choice of the Setting

A partially confined and socially restricted, shut-in environment or community was required for this study. As the factors attributed to the increased reliance of the elderly on television are extended with their increased immobility,, it may be assumed that the housebound or institutionalized have greater reliance upon television. Residents in long term care facilities reside there for extended periods of time; often the remainder of their lives. As their options slip away from them, they may be left with little else to do, except watch television.

A facility where television was used by the residents was required, with the locations of the television sets scattered throughout the institution. It was also important, in considering viewers preferences, that residents have some personal control over some of the sets (sleeping rooms), and staff have access to control of other sets (lounges, sitting rooms, and recreational areas).

The study took place in Western Canada at an extended care facility for elderly men. All of the activities of the study were conducted within the facility over a three

month period in the early part of 1986. This extended period of time was used because the researcher found that it was beneficial to the study to allow the participants to gain a sense of ease with the interviewer by being able to talk about the things which that were important to them. After a period of time the topic of television was introduced and this topic, which might considered by some to be a difficult topic to discuss, was discussed freely and openly by the participants.

Selection of the Participants

An overview of the proposal was be presented to the administrative staff of the extended care facility and interest in the study was expressed. Official approval was sought and received form the institution to conduct the study. The nursing and care staff discussed the research project at an unofficial staff meeting. As the study was conducted at a residence for elderly men, the research particpants were all male.

People who were most receptive, those who were group leaders, and a number of marginal people who might be able to lend insight and depth to the study were invited to participate. Eight of these people became key, primary informants. It was the researcher's intent to discover the dominant processes in the social setting with the goal of generating hypotheses that have a generalized applicability (Field and Morse, 1985, p. 111). Less active and unobtrusive subjects were also observed and interacted with to lend a different perspective on the setting. The inclusion of watchers and non-watchers of television presented a depth to the presentation and expression of the ideas, thoughts, and experiences of the use of television by these individuals and provided valuable comparative data It is recognized that in an institutionalized elderly population, some of the residents may be neurologically impaired. All residents with severe impairments were excluded form the study. Two of the residents who displayed slight impairments (confusion and forgetfulness) were given the opportunity to participate in the study. These impairments did not appear to impeed the responses

when response time was lengthened and patience was practiced by the researcher. Consent was obtained both from each participant, in the study, and the principle of ongoing consent was adhered to (i.e. the resident was reminded repeatedly of the study and verbal consents were obtained throughout) Furthermore, consideration was given to the fact that this study is low risk in that the information collected was not considered personally sensitive for the participants.

Adjustment Difficulties

Adjusting to the aging process is at best difficult, often ajusting to the routines and daily life events of an extended care facility are overwhelming for the residents who live there. Communication problems related to mental functioning which may or may not be caused by physical deficiences often manifest themselves in older persons and this was taken into account by the researcher.

Elderly persons may exhibit apparent memory defects such as being unable to remember the names of persons or objects. They may also have a problem arranging events into proper sequence and temporal relationships. Topographic memory responses may cause problems as right and left and spatial relationships of well-known places become confused (Merrian, 1977, p. 215). The researcher was careful to structure questions requiring these types of responses as simply and directly as possible.

Another aspect of the mental functioning of older people might involve the loss or deficiency in power to use words or understand language -- known as aphasia or dysphasia. Although occasionally caused by injury or disease of the brian, older people often exhibit aphasia as part of their behavior. Upon a number of occasions this communication problem was recognized by defective sentence structure, repetition of phrases, difficulty in discussing abstract topics and breaking off in the middle of a sentence, unable to finish the thought.

It was found that a number of the participants compensated for this defect by

using gesture or pantomine, by making a continued attempt to find the desired word (which ended in success but often in silence), or by using paraphrases or circumlocution -- that is, for a calendar the person might say "it dates" or a thimble might be described as "something to put over your finger to sew with" (Merriam, 1977, p. 216).

The interviewer, encountered this situation a number of times during the interviews and attempted to assist the interviewee by offering a word, as perhaps the "right word," the restructuring of a thought, and the keeping of abstract questions at a minimum. It was important for the interviewer to be sensitive to characteristics of the respondents which might cause problems in the interview. Such factors as hearing loss, slower-paced life style, the need for security and recognition, and reduced mental efficiency were noted upon occasion.

The Use of Grounded Theory

Grounded theory (Glaser and Struass, 1967) originates with observation of a situation or phenomenon without imposing a theoretical structure upon the topic under study. The researcher must be careful not to impose predispositions of conceptual frameworks which might result in the alteration of analytical perceptions of data to some imposed theoretical structure.

In all qualitative research the purpose of the study was to identify the properties existing in the real world and to gain a fuller understanding of what constituted reality for the participants in a particular real-life setting. This understanding gained from this examination was the product of the interaction of the researcher with the phenomena under study (Field and Morse, 1985). As the development of firm grounded theory rests upon the "sensitivity to the researcher's ability to both recognize and present them for discussion" (p.111), this study was limited only to the degree of the researcher's own sensitivity to the participants and the topic under study.

Data Collection Procedures

The research methods consisted of participant observation, semi-structured and unstructured interviews, spot observations, informal interviews with the residents and staff, the use of; secondary informants, secondary data (health records, personal belongings and memorabilia, reading materials, and other environmental objects and belongings). Field notes and observational notes were recorded by the researcher, and a diary was used for recording memos and developing theories (Glaser, 1978).

Participant Observation allowed the researcher to observe the setting and residents, gaining a knowledge of key informants. The researcher was also aware of other individuals who provided a different perspective to the study. These subjective observations were recorded in field notes. Subjective feelings, impressions, and hunches were recorded in the diary. Various settings in the institution were used; lounges, sun rooms, sitting rooms, recreational areas, and only with their permission, the residents' private sleeping rooms. Spot observations (Rogoff, 1978) were also be used and participants were observed during interviews, both formal and informal. Although the researcher made scheduled visits during the early stages of the study, visits at randomly selected times were conducted as the study progressed.

Unstructured interviews of varying lengths and duration were conducted with the residents and staff. All tape recorded interviews were conducted in private and at the convenience of the person concerned. Formal interviews with staff were held during work time but conducted during the staff's free time on a voluntary basis.

Interviews were taped using a code number for each participant to protect that individual's anonymity. As was expected, data was also derived from discussions, informal and spontanous conversations with residents. The option was kept open for further interviews should additional data be needed for clarification. This occured upon a number of occasions.

Secondary Informant Data were obtained from a varity of individuals in the setting who were able to help confirm any tentative hypotheses that developed. These people were not interviewed formally but were approached in general conversation, to verify data obtained from other individuals.

Demographic Data were gathered from the participants in an informal way, assisted the researcher in creating a biographical profile of the participants in the study. Permission was obtained to use nursing care and social history records from the facility.

Data Analysis

A grounded theory approach was employed using Glaser's analysis, developed first in "The Discovery of Grounded Theory" (1967), and later refined and embellished in "Theoretical Sensitivity" (1978) including the use of; substantive coding, theoretical coding, theoretical memoing, the emergence of a core variable, theoretical sorting and writing, and the generation of a formal theory, based upon this methodological approach formed the basis of the research study. In grounded theory the researcher attempts to discover the dominant processes in the social setting with the goal of generating hypotheses that have a generalized applicability (Field and Morse, 1985, p. 111). Using this approach, each piece of datum was compared with every other piece (in constant comparision) rather than derscribing only the unit under study (Stern, 1980, p. 21, in Field and Morse, 1985, p. 111). In this respect grounded theorists use a far more structured analytical approach than other types of qualitative research methodology.

Validity and Reliability

Validity is the overall concept used to refer to how good an answer a study yields with reliability being a constituent element of validity (Field and Morse, 1985, p. 116). The following elements were of importance in the data sampling for reliability and validity; the data gathering process, itself, the social context in which the data were

gathered, the history and maturation of the group being studied, the status of the researcher, participant mortality, observer variables, observer effects, and data analysis (Le Compte and Goertz, 1982, pp. 31-60). A qualitative study may not be replicated as the researcher's purpose is to demonstrate the typicality of the phenomenon observed in a particular situation at a particular time (Field and Morse, 1985, p. 112). At this point a number of questions arose concerning validity and reliability of the data and, indeed, the study itself.

First, it should be noted that subsequent interviews were used, when needed, to verify the interpretation of statements made by the participants. Collaborating data from secondary informants was also used to verify these interpretations.

Next, there was the concern of the validation of categories that emerge during the data analysis phase of the research. Within the analyst, as the research continues, there was a long term biographical and conceptual build up that make this person wise about the data -- how to detail its main problems and processes and not to interpret and explain them theoretically. Sensitivity was necessarily increased by being steeped in the literature that deals with the variables and concepts used. This sensitivity to the subject was limited only by the researcher's capacity and resources (paraphrased from Glaser, 1978, p. 3).

Leininger (1985, 68) contended that validity in qualitative research refers to gaining knowledge and understanding of the true nature, essence, meanings, attributes, and characteristics of a particular phenomenon under study. Measurement was not the goal; rather, knowing and understanding. As always, qualitativie valildity was concerned with confirming the truth or understanding associated with the phenomenon. The emphasis was on establishing the existence and nature of the phenomenon with its meanings, attributes, and contextual features. The qualitative construct validity then, focuses on identifying and knowing the nature, essence, and

underlying attributes of the phenomenon. Concurrent validity refers to the ability to show congruency, meanings, and syntatical relationships of findings with respect to subjective, inferential, intuitive, symbolic, objective (empirical), and other quality factors under consideration. Predictive validity should rest upon the ability (including knowledge and skills) of the researcher to differentiate abstract experimental and empirical phenomenon under study in order to predict human lifeways or behaviours (Leininger, p. 69).

With respect to the criterion of reliability in qualitative research, the focus was on identifying and documenting recurrent, accurate, and consistent (homogeneous) or inconsistent (heterogeneous) features, as patterns, themes, values, world views, experiences, and other phenomena confirmed in similar or different contexts. The method employed to check the reliability of the data, and to insure validity, was derived from the work of Leininger (1985, pp. 155-158).

At this stage the investigator began to label, hypothesize, and cluster data concept formation by coding, hypothesizing and categorizing data. The next step, Concept development, was undertaken by; reducing categories, selective sampling of the literature, selection sampling of the data, and the emergence of the core variable. The final step, concept modification and integration, was derived at through theoretical coding (Glaser, 1978, p. 74). These codes help to define concepts more precisely. In describing the core variable complex process, the researcher clarified the nature of the variable, its contexts, and the potential consequences by using these codes. Memoing allowed the researcher to constantly compare the data, resulting in emerging patterns and themes.

Ethical Considerations

The identities and details (all information) from the study remained confidential at all times. Tapes were erased at the end of the research project. Confidentiality and

anonymity were observed at all levels of the study. Ethical and general clearance were obtained from the several levels necessary to ensure that all due regard taken to protect the individual and institution involved.

Consent was obtained at the onset of the study from; the institution and individuals involved in the study including nursing staff, care givers, domestic staff, extended family (perhaps), and residents in the care facility. With the assistance of the Ward Clerk and care staff, the researcher discussed the study with each resident who had agreed to be a participant, answering questions and obtaining written consent at the beginning of the study.

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Overview of the Viewing Styles of Television

Five styles of viewing were derived from these data which presented categories based upon: interviews and participant observation of primary and secondary informants. One of these categories was based almost exclusively upon observation, without interviews, and staff and residents were later asked to substantiate the data. Four categories: Orientation, Entertainment, Education and Escape served as self oriented functions of television. A fifth category Power and Control, served more of a social function which influenced the interpersonal and group dynamics of the television experience for some.

Orientation as a Function of Television

A number of the residents used television as an orientation mechanism, "keeping up on things, if you will," remarked one of the informants. It reminded another man of it's importance to him, "that's what it's all about, keepin' up on what's goin' on in the world, right?" One man, who often read two newspapers a day, listened to a small pocket radio with a head set, and watched a variety of news programmes on television expressed his need to be aware in the following way:

> You see, things are happening all the time, you gotta keep up or it's gonna' pass ya by, you stay alive by knowin' whats going on. Only a fool would ignore such an important part of their life. How can you know if the bus fare is goin' up or the feds will up the tax on cigarettes? You gotta' watch out for yourself, sure as hell. No one else will. Me, I'm gonna know."

Orientation Views Preferred Genre

News, weather and current events, a variety of nonfiction programming were preferred by the orientation group. Viewers selected programmes which they considered "important" to them and they closely followed communication channels for current information about special and informative programming. In the selection of current news and topics, international events were mentioned as being the most important. National coverage of events was not as important and Provincial news was not as important as either international or national topics. Local events were mentioned as being important, but limited to a few select categories; murders, robberies, accidents (a major train wreck), and hockey scores. Public affairs broadcasting was also popular with some of the men, "I like Face the Nation and those other news commentaries," I also liked to hear those good interviews that Dick Cavette and David Frost used to do."

In the selection of weather forecasts they felt that the local forecast was the most important but there was some interest expressed in national coverage. For two of the participants this was because of the weather forecaster's "presentation style" other than an actual interest in the national weather scene.

Special events of interest to these individuals were television coverage on important people. Prince Charles and Lady Diana's trip to Canada: hearings and investigations, a train wreck, murder trails, drug busts, lottery results, government scandals, and terrorists bombings and highjackings.

Most of these men expressed a general dislike for television commercials saying that they "interferred," "took up time," and generally "disrupted" the programmed they were watching," "were repetitious," and "didn't think they were of much social value."

Characteristics of Viewer Behaviour

These individuals appeared to be self directed in their approach to their own lives. They displayed a degree of independence, some were assertive, others were somewhat outgoing in their interactions with other people. A small portion of this population could be referred to as friendly yet somewhat reserved. They were not as "free and easy" as some of the men when they interacted with each other.

These individuals referred to themselves as "doers." One man claimed to be a "user of television." The data suggested that the more one of these viewers were oriented in their television experience the greater the possibility that they were also "up and going," "doers," in other aspects of their lives. To them time was important, being informed was "paramount." They could be described as outward thinking as much of their time is spent interacting with others. They suggested that they liked to "change things" and that they wanted to "control" their lives. Most of them enjoyed a higher level of health and sensory abilities then any of the other groups. They each appeared to have a positive sense of self. Although a few of them were "quiet for longer periods of time" when there was "something to say" they expressed it.

Summary

The data suggested that the most salient use of television by the participants was to gain information about other people and events in the larger community. Television was expressed as being important with news, weather, and other nonfiction programming being the most popular with this group of viewers.

The degree to which it was used as an orientation or "information" channel was dependent upon the individual using it. Even for individuals who claimed they did not use television to get "information" the data of this study showed that they did indeed " gain information." All television

presents information for consumption. Some informants described their experiences and motivations in different terms, but it was not unrealistic to think that information, from television, did perform the function of "orientation" for many.

Entertainment as a Function of Television

At a glance the viewer of television for entertainment purpose would appear not to be too different from the orientation viewer, but there are several distinct differences. A number of the orientation motivated individuals stated they watched television for entertainment, too. Because the motivational factors for watching television as entertainment were different, the attention to television and the behaviours displayed by the viewers were also different.

To these viewers, most of the television programming they watched was considered to be entertainment. These individuals watched more total hours of television than did the orientation group.

Entertainment Viewers Preferred Genre

While some of them tended to be very selective of the programmed they choose to be entertained by, most of them watched a wide variety of programmes including; game shows, situation comedies, action adventure, drama, fantasy fiction, policy detective, and most prime time programming.

Characteristics of Viewer Behaviour

These viewers were characterized as being somewhat less serious than the orientation group and less retrospective than the reminiscence (escape) group. These men, because of health reasons, found themselves in a more restricted environment. They are confined to wheelchairs. They tend to be more dependent on the services and support offered by the residence staff, and may be more accepting of self-situations (degrees of social confinement and physical restrictions than other groups. These viewers tended to watch and endorse things that they felt had more of an entertainment aspect to them. The only programme choices they shared with the orientation group

were the news and weather. The data reflected that most of the viewers watched some form of news and many "sat through" the weather, even when they did not select it. It would appear that the entertainment viewers had well defined ideas of what they perceived as entertainment television and made their selections and tailored their viewing styles to these ideas.

Education as a Function of Television

Watching television to learn something is certainly not a new idea. People learn from experience. By watching, experiencing television individuals learn. The degree to which people were aware that they "learn" was of interest here. Several of the residents used television as an educational vehicle, but few seemed to understand that there was indeed an educational aspect to all their television viewing experience.

Education Viewers Preferred Genre

A variety of programming was mentioned as being entertaining but also educational by the viewers. Nature programmed were perhaps the most popular. Programmes dealing with cooking, arts and crafts, woodworking, and travel were mentioned. A number of public affairs type programming were mentioned, some specials and current events were mentioned as "interesting" and "educational" by the viewers. Documentaries were mentioned but did not appear as popular. The interest in drama was limited mainly the "period pieces."

Characteristics of Viewer Behaviour

These viewers appeared to be quite alert, some what selective and purposeful in their choices. They were individuals who were interested, more or less, in seeing things. They tended to be somewhat more motivated to "watch" educational programmes. They were talkative and a lot of social interaction occurs within this group. Not all of them were overly interested in people. Many expressed interest in events, animals, history, stories, and current events. A number of them were "surprized" at the incidental learning that took place when their attention was brought to it.

Some became more interested "to see what they could remember" from a programme they had just viewed the day before. This interest took shape in "games" of talking about what they remembered. These viewers like the others were alert, interested, and aware of television.

Escape and a Function of Television

The largest number of residents were found in this category. They watched for many different reasons, but it would be reasonable to suggest that these individuals were the heaviest users of television and are perhaps the least aware of the medium of television and it's influences upon their daily lives.

Escape Viewers Preferred Genre

These people watched soap operas, prime time programmes, serials, mini-series and things that go "on and on." They spent long hours in front of the television set and few seemed to remember from day to day what they have seen.

Characteristics of Viewer Behaviour

These people tended to be more withdrawn than any other group. Little social interaction occurred with their peers, and most of their time is spent watching, and experiencing television.

Power and Control as a Social Function of Television

A number of the residents and staff exerted a degree of "control" over the television sets in the residence. Five of these seven large television receivers were located in the lounges and sunrooms, the other two were located in the lounges located at the nursing stations. These locations were referred to as "commons areas" giving access to the television to both staff and residents.

A control behaviours were manifested in a number of ways: standing postures beside or in front of the set; blockading with wheelchairs, limiting the access to the set; removing a remote control device from the television environment; control by interruption by a peer, and control by

intervention and control from a staff member.

These attempts to exert power over and have control of the operation of the television programming, referred to as expressions of "power and control," were observable in a number of social settings.

A number of individuals, staff and residents, were involved in the control of the content of television programming in the television viewing environments. Four styles of control were identified; the Active Controller, the Local/private Controller, the Unsuccessful Controller, and the Passive Viewer who had no control.

The Active Controllers, of the television environment used several strategies to control the television viewing situations. This behaviour appeared to be socially motivated, their interest in the television content was limited, more emphasis was placed upon using the television set as a form of control within the television environment.

The Local/private Controllers reacted differently from the reactions of the Active Controller who's presence was seen as an "intrusion" by other viewers. These viewers chose to stay with "their own sets" by choice and maintained control over the set by the choice of solitary viewing.

Others sought out the social settings but remained solitary viewers. They stayed in the setting as long as they were alone. When some other person arrived they left the setting and returned to their own rooms.

Power and Control Viewers Preferred Genre

There was little choice made by any of the participants. The television content appeared to be incidental to the "games" being played by a number of people about the residence. A controllers were somewhat selective of the programming but for the most part it "really didn't matter what was on, it depended what was controlling the set."

In Conclusion

This research study established a number of things. First, the elderly in socially restricted and physically confined settings (lodges, nursing

homes, extended care facilities, and seniors homes) do watch a lot of television. The orientation group watched between two and three hours per day. The entertainment group watched more, around four to five hours a day. The educational group watched about the same number of hours as did the entertainment group. By far, the heaviest viewers were those who used television to escape, watching between eight and twelve hours per day. Six residents were found to watch 14 to 16 hours of television each day.

Second, social isolation does exist. "We are living among strangers" claimed one man. They are alone, they stay alone, and they isolate themselves further by escaping into television. By watching television they feel they are "doing something" and do not have to socially interact with their peers.

Third, television may not be the cause of this isolation but it is a contributing factor. It is the way that television is used that promotes the isolation aspect of the medium. Social and personal isolation will continue. Education and awareness building may help to educate the viewers about the role of television in their lives.

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